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Abstract Title: State Regulations and Licensing of Foster Parents

Abstract: Foster care is defined in the Code of Federal Regulations as 24-hour substitute care for children outside their own homes. It is important to emphasize that foster care is not meant to be a permanent solution to unsafe conditions in a child's home. In fact, the Administration of Children and Families specifically states that foster care is meant to be temporary and the law strongly promotes timely adoption of children who cannot safely return to their parents. Research supports this legislation and suggests that foster care is potentially detrimental to children, and the negative effects may increase the longer children are in care. Abuse and neglect have been documented in foster homes for decades, which elicits concern over the safety of foster care. Additionally, foster children are much more likely to have mental health and chronic medical problems compared with their peers. For this study, five randomly selected states (Georgia, South Carolina, Connecticut, Ohio, and California) are used to examine regulations for licensing foster parents within an ecological framework. A preliminary review of current legislation indicates a wide variety of foster care regulations among states. While all states reviewed included basic statutes related to criminal background checks, home studies, foster parent training, and maximum limits on the number of children in care, the specific details of who is excluded from full licensure vary. Differences exist in the criminal or Child Protective Service findings that states use to determine if placement is appropriate, as well as the number of hours of training required, the specific elements of the home study, and the number of children who may reside in the home. Additionally, some states require that a family meet further standards such as physical examinations or income reviews. For the purposes of this analysis, only licensing standards for regular foster families (i.e., not relative or kinship care) are assessed.